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Temporal Vertigo and Time Vortices on Greece's Central Plain

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The consequences of prolonged fiscal austerity have left people in Trikala, central Greece, with feelings of intense temporal vertigo: confusion and anxiety about where and when they belong in overarching timelines of pasts and futures. Some people report feeling 'thrown back in time' to past eras of poverty and suffering, while others discuss their experiences of the current crisis situation as reliving multiple moments of the past assembled in the present. This article analyses how locals understand their complex experiences of time and temporality, and promotes the accommodation of messy narratives of time that can otherwise leave the researcher feeling sea-sick.

Keywords: assemblage, crisis, future, Greece, temporality, time

Introduction

'Have you ever seen that programme *Star Trek*?' Despoina asks me as we walk through the weekly market in the centre of Trikala, a town on the central plains of mainland Greece. 'I remember as a child', she nudges me in the side with her elbow to make sure that I am paying attention, 'watching William Shatner and the guy with the big pointy ears race around outer space, jumping to warp speed and collapsing any preconceptions we humble humans on 1970s Earth might have had about space and time. I drew a picture of William Shatner on the front of my school exercise book. I used to kiss him goodnight'. She recoils in feigned embarrassment. 'And then, when I was at university in the early 1990s I got into the next *Star Trek* series with Captain Jean-Luc Picard and Commander William Riker, that womanizer. *The Next Generation* it was called, you know'. I nod vigorously in agreement. 'Wow. I was in love with Patrick Stewart, that bald beauty of a man; absolutely besotted I was'. I probed

Despoina as to why she had, seemingly out of the blue, started reminiscing about a cult science-fiction series while walking through the somewhat mundane Monday fruit and veg market this crisp autumn morning in 2014. I knew that *Star Trek* had been a national phenomenon in 1970s Greece, but her decision to bring up the topic now had caught me unawares. ‘Well, all these people here, all these stall attendants, their families, are experiencing a temporal flux (*chroniki reustotita*). Time is no longer what it seems’. This is a phrase that I have heard repeated in Trikala since the onset of severe economic crisis in 2009 as locals attempt to articulate feelings of ‘history repeating itself’, ‘time standing still’ and ‘being thrown back to previous times of suffering’, to cite just a handful of colloquialisms. Despoina continues: ‘temporal vortices, time travel, temporal anomalies and fluxes, worm holes, travelling faster than the speed of light, getting stuck in time loops where you repeat exactly the same activities every day for years on end’. These, Despoina assured me, were the ‘crazy things about *Star Trek* that actually make you stop and think about your own life experiences’. She admitted that over the past three years she had once again started watching *Star Trek* to try to better understand her existence, as well as put the struggles of her own life into perspective.¹

Living with the consequences of prolonged economic austerity has sharpened people’s experience of time and temporality in central Greece.² The crisis has created a sense of temporal vertigo in Trikala, intense confusion where the past provides direction, comfort and justification to the present and for the immediate future. When discussing economic crisis, narrators jump from recounting oppression during the Ottoman era to occupation during the Second World War and the stock-market crash at the turn of the twenty-first century. They often claim to be reliving past eras of crisis, as if a linear sense of time has collapsed. Actors ‘bounce around’ through the past, paying little respect to temporal distance, condensing events that are separated by decades, sometimes centuries, of linear time into singularly

meaningful moments in the present (Knight 2015a) to provide trajectories for uncertain futures. Their experience of the multiple temporalities of crisis is often articulated through material artefacts or popular culture – for instance, through objects such as photovoltaic panels that stand on farmland and represent hi-tech, ultra-modern futures on the one hand (Knight 2014) as well as being neo-colonial projects of extraction on the other (Argenti and Knight 2015); fossils that trigger ideas of how the past is preserved and later unearthed (Knight 2017); items of food that are symbolic of previous times of famine and present fears of hunger in the near future (Knight 2012); or slogans that resonate with other historical epochs (Knight 2015b). In Trikala, people discuss their worries of returning to past eras of hardship while drawing courage that even the worst crises can be overcome, that they will eventually emerge from the current crisis situation. This article explores two ways in which there is a sense of temporal vertigo in Trikala: the belief that people are ‘going back in time’ (*piso sto chrono*) to previous epochs, and the idea that moments in time (selective pasts) have been stitched together in the present. In both cases, locals argue that linear notions of time as a sequential progression of events have been ruptured by crisis. My research participants report time having ‘slowed down’, to be ‘going backwards’ or ‘repeating itself’ in a continuous time loop, adding to the sense of temporal confusion. Exploring temporal vertigo requires suspending assumed interpretations of past and present as well as tacit agreements about the social and cultural norms attributed to time (Valentine et al. 2012: 1008).

For Despoina (now aged 44), who closed her shop selling beauty products in 2012 and has two sons living at home despite both gaining degrees from Greek universities, *Star Trek* provides the perfect medium through which to discuss her temporal vertigo as it helps her to connect the unusual to ‘a proximate and intimately embodied complex of human activity’ (ibid.: 1019). She uses the familiarity of *Star Trek* to confront and ‘translate’ the ‘blind spots’ of temporal experience which have arrived as a complete surprise on the scene of her sleepy

life in central Greece (cf. Battaglia 2012: 1080, 1091). As Debora Battaglia so aptly puts it, ‘emanating from the outerspaces of cultural imaginaries, it [the ‘E.T. effect’; but in the present case, *Star Trek*] draws us to the horizons of subjects’ innerspaces’ (Battaglia 2005: 2).³

Talking about temporal phenomena encountered in *Star Trek*, Despoina rhetorically asks: ‘Do I belong to a time of foreign occupation or am I free and modern? ... These market stalls that you see around you do not make people money. Can you seriously say that what you see, this Balkan-like, third-world chaos, is part of a modern Europe?’ She says that her friends and family are posing similar questions. ‘I feel a closer connection to the time of my deceased grandmother than to the time of my son. Our times are closer, I am reliving her life’. I ask Despoina to explain what she means about the closeness of times, for I had heard a lot about the ‘proximity’ of specific pasts – such as the 1941-1943 Great Famine, the Nazi occupation, and the 1967-74 military dictatorship (see Knight 2015a) – to the present. She replies that the life experiences of her grandmother, who was born in Greek Macedonia while it was still under Ottoman rule, consisted of extreme poverty: ‘the most important aspect of everyday life was looking for a way to survive. Where to find the next meal? How to dodge the latest invader?’ But she was always upbeat and optimistic. ‘My 24-year-old son plays on his PlayStation all day and is apathetic about his future. Why should he have any hope? His future is already destroyed ... [W]e have hit a vortex, an anomaly that causes all this confusion of where we belong and which way we are going. We are stuck, adrift on a sandbar of time’. Despoina is pessimistic about recovery and emergence from the crisis. She sees no end in sight in this black hole of debt, austerity measures and increasing poverty. Nothing can be done to stop Greeks from being plunged back into another era, falling through the vortex. Despite the high-profile protests on the streets of Athens and the rise to power of a left-wing ‘radical’ government, Despoina remarks that ‘resistance is futile’ to the austerity imposed by the troika of the European Commission (EC), European Central Bank (ECB) and International

Monetary Fund (IMF) – and the vested interests of opportunistic politicians, left and right; ‘we will be assimilated!’ she adds. As a result, she sees no emergence from this time twister, this sandbar: ‘anyway, the futures we were promised are already history’.

Thinking through the Vortex

Like Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, being blown backwards towards the future while contemplating the ruins of the past, locals stitch together specific moments in time, paying little attention to temporal distance.⁴ The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption or emergence, Benjamin (1968: 254–55) suggests, and thus holds a claim over the present through moments of history that ‘flit up’ to be recognized in the present in times of danger and suffering. In the context of the Greek economic crisis, one could claim that the past redeems a population that feels ‘abandoned’ by mainstream politics,⁵ acting as a guide to lost souls. Accounting for the counter-currents, pauses and ruptures in the manner that time is experienced, this article explores the temporal vertigo created by economic crisis and chronic uncertainty in terms of local perceptions of, first, falling back through time to past eras; second, how multiple pasts have been superimposed on the present (cf. Zerubavel 2003) and third, emergence from perpetual crisis toward potential futures.

To understand the feelings of cyclical pasts and emerging futures, one first has to focus on the present. Although the present is under stress from encompassing the entire history of mankind at a single moment in ‘an enormous abridgement’, it is, according to Benjamin (1968: 253, 263) free from envy towards the future. The idea of planning for immediate circumstances rather than the near- or long-term is, Jane Guyer suggests, a facet of twenty-first century neoliberalism that resonates with evangelical views on time in what she terms ‘event-driven temporal frames’ (Guyer 2007: 409; cf. Knight and Stewart 2016). This focus on presentism (see Bryant 2014, 2016; Pipyrrou 2016) allows for actors to channel their

resources into day-to-day survival in what Benjamin terms the ‘now time’ that is loaded with splinters of the past. In relation to economic schedules, Guyer (2007: 416) notes the ‘thinning out’ of complexity in collective near futures for policy to be enshrined in doctrine and guidelines defined for a more distant future – as is currently the case with the punishing austerity measures imposed on Greece that deal with present problems with little regard for the near- or mid-term future.⁶ This has left people feeling abandoned as they will never experience first-hand the long-term future which the current hardship is supposed to serve. Exhaustion after six years of crisis, apparently without respite anytime soon, has defeated imaginations of scenarios for a better future; interest in the post-apocalyptic is a bridge too far for exhausted people. Feelings of resignation and helplessness are expressed by both younger and older generations, the future has been firmly defeated and, importantly, there is no preparation for a future that the next generation can find. Older people know that they will not be around to live the post-apocalyptic future, and exhausted youngsters have written themselves out of the future, which they see as overpoweringly based on distrust, contempt, apathy.

For my research participants, the uncertainty caused by austerity requires the critical contemplation of everyday activities, which induces moments of anxiety and stress, moments when the present becomes uncanny (Bryant 2014, 2016; Stewart 2017), caught in suspended animation. Through her work in Cyprus, Rebecca Bryant considers why people discuss fears of recurring and repeating traumatic pasts. Following Janet Roitman’s (2014) reading that an event becomes a crisis because it shows how the world could be otherwise, Bryant maintains that crisis represents a critical threshold outside normal time. She argues that at a time of crisis ‘we acquire a sense that what we do in this present will be decisive for both the past and the future, giving to the present the status of a threshold’ (Bryant 2016: 20). Crisis, she claims, becomes such precisely because it brings the present into consciousness, creating an

awareness or perception of present-ness that we do not normally have: the present becomes ‘uncanny’; the familiar is made strange, feels peculiar. The present feels ‘distorted and disturbed’ due to the looming ‘edifice’ of crisis leaking through its cracks.⁷ Thinking in Bergsonian terms, we could say that in moments of the uncanny present, people consciously reflect on the ‘immediate part of the past which, impending of the future, seeks to realize and associate with it’ (Bergson 1991: 150; see also Dalsheim 2015). The past gnaws through into the future (Bergson 2002: 173). For Bryant and my research participants in Trikala alike, the present becomes uncanny due to the social interrogation of the ‘now’ and its usually unquestioned links between past, present and future.

Popi, a housewife in her forties and mother to an eleven-year-old son, discusses her increased anxiety about the present and immediate future, something that she is trying to understand through accessing the past. Since she lost her job in the public sector three years ago, Popi has taken to visiting the Trikala town library to try to gain a better understanding of the political and economic forces at work in the present crisis and read up on local history. ‘When I lost my job I was so anxious. I sat at home all day, waiting for the clock to tick round. For the first year it was as if time stood still. Or at least, it seemed like everything was happening in slow motion’. Popi became acutely aware that her life was passing her by. She felt that she was operating on a different time-scape to others around her (cf. Bear 2014). ‘What can you do? We have had crisis in our lives twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for six years. Those six years feel like fifty – no exaggeration’. This is something that I have regularly been told in Trikala – that the crisis seems to have ‘lasted a lifetime’ (*kratise mia zoi*). ‘Has it really only been six years?’ an elderly man remarked in a supermarket queue on being cheerfully greeted by the cashier who had narrowly avoided redundancy in a recent round of job cuts. A young unemployed man with a university education complains that his life is ‘dragging’, ‘the last six years have passed by so slowly’. He continues mournfully with

an ironic lament: 'It is as if Greece has always been in crisis. I cannot remember what life was like before the crisis, it is surreal – maybe there is no such thing as pre-crisis Greece, it might be a myth' (a myth of pre-crisis that mirrors the myth of post-crisis and intensifies feelings of being trapped in the present). The 24/7 media coverage that infiltrates every aspect of life heightens the notion of being 'surrounded', 'swamped' and 'suffocated' by the crisis. Popi continues, 'I decided that I would have to try my best to keep living my life as normally as possible because the situation is totally out of my control. Bureaucrats and politicians in Berlin and Brussels will decide whether I have a future or not. They will decide if I live or die'. Popi got to the point of having regular panic attacks because of anxiety about providing food and shelter for her son. 'Suddenly the life of my grandparents felt very close. They died many years ago, but as a child I had heard their stories about poverty in their mountain village. I decided to go to the library and learn more about their times, their history'. She pauses here to tell me how her grandparents and their fellow villagers never referred to calendar dates or birthdays to discuss their lives; instead they referred to events such as marriages, droughts or the building of the village church. Popi picked up her narrative by stating that she hoped to better understand her existence by reading up on the past and on wider issues of politics and history: 'I suppose that it is very important what I do now, today, because I don't see light at the end of the tunnel. For my son, there may well be no tomorrow, and I want to understand why'.

I have found the work of Michel Serres inspirational in helping think through the ethnographic material concerning non-linear time and the embodiment of the past in the present (see Knight 2015a). According to Serres (1995b: 57), it is the common assumption that time is linear that distorts the perception that some events are apparently distant. Human relationships to time subjectively vary and are often convoluted (Gell 1992; Stewart 2003: 482). Serres argues that 'time doesn't pass, it percolates ... it passes and it doesn't pass'; it

filters, 'one flux passes through, while another does not' (Serres 1995b: 58). Some segments of the past get caught in the filtration process; they remain contemporary, they remain proximate. At times of dramatic social change, people in Trikala draw on these events to decipher present-day circumstances and render them, if not bearable, at least comprehensible and surmountable. Time, Serres suggests, at first appears as though flowing like a river passing beneath a bridge – the Heraclitean view of time; however, one fails to consider the invisible counter-currents running beneath the surface in the opposite direction or the hidden turbulence that remains out of sight to the casual observer. Locals draw on the past, emergent aspects of the present and visions of the future to assemble their crisis experience. An object such as a photovoltaic panel, a fossil, an item of food or even the interpretation of a 1960s or 1970s television programme reveals time to be polychronic, topological and gathered together, with multiple pleats.

Approaching the experience of time as non-linear leads Serres to the idea of 'assemblage' – events, he suggests, exist as part of our own era, and are also an assemblage of reconstituted historical fragments (ibid.: 47). Crisis experience is an 'active synthesis', a 'scrambling' (Stewart 2012: 191) of moments of the past. This is in contrast to common perceptions of events being confined to their own time, their own period, unable to communicate beyond their own boundaries, imprisoning history and critical events, suffocating the remarkable connections between seemingly distant episodes. People in Trikala are experiencing the financial crisis in terms of seemingly heterogeneous historical moments knitted together. Sourced from many temporal points – Ottoman and Axis occupation, the Great Famine, civil war, the military junta – these moments are fused together to form an assemblage of contemporaneity (Deleuze 1991: 38).⁸ The heterogeneous nature of multiple temporal moments makes for an uncertain and unforeseeable future not necessarily bound to the present or to any singular specific historical era (Deleuze 1994; Hodges 2007, 2010). For

my research participants, their future trajectory has become uncertain, highlighted by diverse coping strategies and increased unease surrounding notions of belonging and temporal trajectories – are they heading forwards or backwards or are they caught in a cyclical uncanny present, an extreme spin cycle that leaves them struggling to walk straight? Here I want to emphasize the importance of considering directionality when discussing assemblage, something that is too often absent from the existing literature.

The feeling of being trapped between pasts of poverty and destitution and promised but hopeless futures is a core theme of crisis narratives in Trikala. A close friend named Thanos, in his early sixties, is a local doctor who expresses his feelings of temporal flux in terms of belonging. ‘We are constantly told that Greece belongs to a modern, futuristic West; a modern, futuristic, prosperous Europe’. At this point he gives special reference to European Union-backed programmes such as renewable energy initiatives, as well as highlighting the extensive political rhetoric coming out of Brussels, Berlin and Athens concerning Greece’s legitimate place in the eurozone and European Union. ‘But then we are left cold at night [due to the cost of central heating], we see people searching through rubbish bins or chasing ducks on the river for food, our children are unemployed ... My sister even helps at the local soup kitchen’. Surely, Thanos passionately remarks, leaning across his desk and squeezing my hand, ‘we are flying back in time. That is the sense that I get from my patients. They have lost their sense of belonging, their position on the timeline. For many, the future doesn’t exist; there is no emergence from the present, only a “reverse” gear’.

Another informant, Dimitris, explains his confusion as to where and when he is. ‘Everything is happening at once. We have the Great Famine on our doorstep, the Germans have sparked another occupation, I pay taxes as if I live in the Ottoman Empire and Europe is like a foreign dictator. The kids are even shouting slogans last heard during the junta (which lasted from 1967 to 1974). All this history is happening at once’. Dimitris, who is in his

thirties and makes a living selling illegally felled firewood used by people to heat their homes, says that he recognizes the assemblage of different moments of the past converging on present-day Trikala, but he is confused; indeed, he ‘feels dizzy, light-headed’ (*zalizete*) by the contradictory rhetoric coming from the prime minister in Athens and bureaucrats in Brussels and Berlin. ‘They say that we are suffering all this pain in order to build a brighter future. A future together in a rich and prosperous Europe. But we have been returned back to times of wartime peasantry in order to build our so-called future. It just doesn’t make sense’.

Dimitris alludes to how the present is often referenced as an assemblage of fragmented but highly affective pasts that haunt everyday life (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2012: 17), forcing people to reflect more widely on the position of Greece as stuck between, in Dimitris’s words, ‘archaic, wartime peasantry and backwardness’ and ‘futuristic, hi-tech, European hyper-modernity’. He notes that even the former prime minister, Antonis Samaras, spoke of the punishing austerity ravishing the country, leading to unacceptable levels of poverty and suffering, but in his next breath promised free wi-fi internet nationwide as one of his leading policies (see Knight 2015b). This helps create the explicit temporal vertigo reported by my informants.

A temporal assemblage that makes people rethink their existence or question their trajectory consists of, according to Serres, disparate ‘scientific and technical solutions dating from different periods. One can date it component by component’ (Serres 1995b:45). This, in a sense, is what Dimitris is explaining when saying that parts of his everyday experience of life in austerity Greece can be identified – dated – to Ottoman landlord agreements, Nazi occupation and life under the military junta. All these episodes of the past are, for people like Dimitris, part of the assemblage of his everyday life.⁹ Pertinent to considering the meeting ground of temporalities, Michel Callon defines assemblages as denoting socio-technical arrangements when they are considered from the point of view of their capacity to ‘act and to

give meaning to action' (Callon 2005: 4). He argues that refiguring these socio-technical arrangements requires rethinking material, textual and other investments. Discussions of high-tech futures as promoted in the former prime minister's wi-fi policy and through European Union renewable-energy initiatives, to name but two sources, go hand in hand with fears over hunger, feelings of occupation and the continuing possibility of exiting the European single currency, accentuating the confusion that people feel about their place in the world.

A>The Déjà Vu of Emergence

In summer 2014, the then Greek prime minister, Antonis Samaras, made a bold statement that got my research participants contemplating the potential futures of a post-crisis nation. In May 2014 the prime minister triumphantly announced: 'There is growth (*anaptiksi*) ... we have come out of crisis ... Greece can once again borrow money ... we can get loans ... we did it together, we have officially emerged from the crisis'. Although laughed off as hollow political rhetoric by a large section of the Greek population suffering the consequences of the austerity measures imposed by the EC, ECB and IMF, the prime minister's words sparked public debate about what emergence and a post-crisis future might look like.

Citing moments of the past as a way to understand the current crisis has led to an intimacy with critical events that some informants find comforting, knowing the past offers a deal of security and direction to their turbulent lives. Being 'suspended in time' in a 'crisis that has lasted a lifetime', a dominant collective voice in Trikala suggests that people have learnt to cope with decreased living standards and tighter budgets; they have managed to contain the crisis situation and fear the prospect of an emergent post-crisis nation.

Furthermore, many locals report having become 'accustomed' and 'habituated' to the idea of emergence as a never-ending cyclical process. Emerging from crisis (and, indeed, 'crisis' itself) is a means to think through regular everyday encounters, structuring imaginations of the

future.¹⁰ The intimacy felt with the crisis situation and the incessant anticipation of emergence has fed into the idea of being stuck in a never-ending cycle. Anticipation, Sami Hermez suggests, is a 'means to predetermine, or reveal, the outcome of an occurrence at some future time' (Hermez 2012: 333), by stretching one's intuition over a specific time period. Anticipation can be thought of as bridging the anxious gap between perception and certain knowledge, allowing people to act 'as if they know' the future (ibid.: 333). The anticipation of emergence works from a present to fold the knowable past into the unknowable future.

A conversation with a 33-year-old waitress, Vaso, is representative of how people have become over-familiar with the idea of emergence: 'We have heard it so many times. The crisis is over. The economy is improving. But these are not just words. One experiences déjà vu, it is a physical feeling of repetition. It makes you dizzy, gives you palpitations. Emergence-crisis, emergence-crisis, emergence-crisis'. Vaso feels anxious and confused when she hears talk about Greece's future:

I now feel threatened by what the future may hold, the unknowable direction our fatherland (*patrida*) will take. For five years we have lived with the crisis 24/7 and we have had to learn to adapt. We have taken lessons from the past to craft out some form of existence, and just as we have learnt how to live on these renegotiated terms, suddenly our future is up in the air again. Are we really emerging from crisis? Is this another piece of political rhetoric? What might this new time look like for the future of my children?

Once again, the 'threat of emergence' into uncertain trajectories is based on historically endorsed fears that people will be thrown backwards into even worse times of uncertainty and hardship. Emergence can, Slavoj Žižek (2014: 5–6) argues, undermine every stable scheme. Vaso says that people now 'know what they need to do to survive' and, fearing that 'one neo-

colonial programme' of dispossession will simply be replaced by another, she remarkably says that she is 'happy to remain' with the current status-quo. 'At least in the present we can now position ourselves in history, take comfort from familiarity and the fact that we have adapted to serve our basic needs'. Perhaps Vaso's words are representative of how people in Trikala feel downtrodden, exhausted by six years of crisis talk, unable to stimulate imaginations for alternative futures; an intimacy with crisis that breeds a kind of Stockholm syndrome. She seems resigned, disenchanted with her own government, and believes that the so-called 'crisis' is no longer a passing phase but a chronic long-term situation that should, for now, be accepted as an unavoidable facet of both the present and future. Her parting remarks are pertinent here: 'The past has taught us that crises can be overcome, but in what way? Once we are told that we have overcome this moment of history [the current crisis] what then? How can we position ourselves for a future which is unknown?' Vaso is stuck in her present, taking guidance from familiar pasts, and to emerge suggests something new, something different, and only potentially something better. For Vaso, the prime minister's promise of emergence represents an elongation of the critical present and a reliving of painful pasts, rather than a promising 'new future'. Despite its indexical relation to newness, Sam Collins (2008) argues that the trope of emergence tends to recapture its own potential, to foreclose the possibilities of futures by containing it within the 'past-present relation'. For Collins, the key problem is that there is usually little surprise in what emerges; typically neoliberal projects emerging in their own image (see Valentine et al. 2012: 1018).

I decided to take up the conversation on the *déjà vu* of emergence and post-crisis futures with Despoina, of opening narrative fame, who suggested that post-crisis futures may be construed in sci-fi terms as 'post-apocalyptic': 'You know, like the Hollywood films. There is a huge disaster, a crisis if you like, and then Earth is inhabited by mindless zombies. Or there might be a deadly virus. Or people are left to fight-off machines'. She pauses to

dwell on her last sentence. ‘Actually, I guess that we are already fighting the machine, the system, but that is nothing new for Greeks. We fought off the Ottomans, the Germans, the fascists, now we are fighting-off a new enemy. So you can understand why we all feel as though we have been here before’. Despoina concludes that there is nothing new in this world, that life is full of *déjà vu* and stories that are assemblages of moments of the past.

Conclusion: Messy Ethnographies of Time

In this article, I have taken the liberty of the ‘time-tricking’ theme to demonstrate just how messy an ethnography of time can be. On the one hand, my research participants describe being thrown back in time to previous eras of poverty and suffering. On the other, they discuss the present as an amalgamation, an assemblage, of disparate pasts which they are now reliving, allowing me to make an original contribution to the literature on ‘assemblage’ by including concepts of directionality. When discussing the current economic crisis, people in Trikala make temporal leaps, skipping from discussing the early-nineteenth-century Ottoman era to twenty-first-century austerity Greece, collapsing stories of life under Ottoman landlords with Nazi occupation and condensing nationalized accounts with personal experience. They ‘bounce around’ through the past, knitting together disparate events that feel temporally and culturally ‘close’ to current circumstances. This all adds to the sense of temporal vertigo experienced in Trikala today, confusion as to where and when one belongs, culminating in reports of feeling ‘dizzy’ and ‘nauseous’ – the ‘elsewhere’ and ‘elsewhen’ of being ‘lost in time’ (Battaglia 2005: 4). The past offers some direction and stability to the situation of high anxiety, especially when people express explicit fears about what the future might hold.

There is also the sense that the present is never-ending, perpetually caught in the ‘temporal ricochets between past and future’ (Valentine et al. 2012: 1023; cf. Knight and Stewart 2016).

Exhausted and disillusioned, people are trapped in cyclical events from which there is no escape – stranded on the temporal sandbar as Despoina puts it. With this in mind, perhaps it should be of no surprise that *Star Trek* helps people like Despoina contemplate their relationship with time, with stories of temporal paradoxes, cyclical and anomalous time, and time travel. For Despoina, the fictional exploration of extra-terrestrial phenomena in the cosmos provides an ‘enduring horizon for meaning-making and futures’ (Valentine et al. 2012: 1008) where she can question the ‘many assumptions about world-making projects’ (Battaglia 2012: 1100) such as the current regime of neoliberal austerity. When – echoing the tag-line of infamous *Star Trek* bad guys, the Borg – she says that ‘resistance is futile’, she not only refers to the feeling of uncontrollably plummeting back through the vortex of time, but also the resignation that resistance to troika-imposed austerity (and the associated temporal confusion this causes) is pointless. Like Despoina, many people feel that the situation of chronic austerity is out of their control, with international creditors and national governments (left and right) behaving as they please, defeating imaginations of better futures. Sci-fi, fossils, renewable-energy infrastructure and items of food offer rich metaphors for understanding the temporal relationships between resurfacing histories and uncertain futures (see Knight 2015a). The fractured fairy tale of futures once promised as a birthright in the European neoliberal world have been thrown into disarray, and local people are turning to meaningful shards of the past to make sense of their crisis experience. But the familiarity with feelings of ‘history repeating itself’, with the temporal ‘spin cycle’, has also led to a sense of comfort and security with the present crisis situation. For some, the emergent future, it seems, is more daunting than the painful past. My informants are tricking time and time is tricking them.

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¹ There have been numerous texts written on anthropology and *Star Trek*, including Porter (2004), Fedorak (2007) and Collins (2008).

² Laura Bear (2015) has recently commented on the social and economic consequences of long-term austerity policy in India, and I recommend it be read in parallel to accounts of temporalities of austerity in Greece.

³ Battaglia's quote about 'innerspace' is resonant with the introductory lines from another sci-fi television series of the era, *The Outer Limits*, with its famous tagline 'from the inner mind to – the outer limits' (see <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCcdr4O-3gE>>, accessed 15th November 2015).

⁴ Michel Serres (1995a) also uses the concept of angels as messengers that communicate between diverse epochs of space and time.

⁵ Drawing on Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben (1998) argues for the Messianic overturning of the condition of abandonment – the ordinary relation of law to life, manifested through a bloody nexus of sovereign violence and biopolitics (see also Palumbo 2016).

⁶ Similarly, Fredric Jameson argues that the present demands 'archaeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past' (Jameson 2002: 215).

⁷ On uncanny stories, see Lepselter (2005: 258–62).

⁸ Gilles Deleuze theorizes paradoxes of contemporaneity and coexistence, arguing that moments of the past are accessible through various avenues of remembering and embodying (Deleuze 1994: 81–82; see also Hodges 2007: 38; 2008).

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari state that an assemblage is made up of an intermingling of 'bodies of actions and passions' and statements that create ongoing processes of territorialization

(Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 88). In a similar fashion, Bruno Latour (1993, 2005) argues that an assemblage is a loose descriptor of heterogeneous structures, consisting of human as well as non-human elements. These structures are constantly put together in a dynamic manner as vibrant entities under constant reconfiguration.

¹⁰ Cf. Roitman (2014) on crisis as an everyday narrative device.